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THE DIFFICULTIES AND DISCOURAGEMENTS IN THE EARLY STAGES OF THE LATIN COURSE.

THE large percentage of time allotted to the study of Latin in our leading secondary schools is quite significant. It seems to indicate a general recognition of the close relationship that manifestly exists between success or failure in the study of Latin and success or failure in the attempt to acquire a liberal or semi-liberal education.

The Roxbury Latin School gives 23.1 per cent. of its recitation hours to the study of Latin; the Boston Latin School, 22.5 per cent.; the Cambridge Latin School, 30½ per cent.; the Phillips Exeter Academy, 29.7 per cent.; and the Phillips Andover Academy, 31.9 per cent.

If, as these data seem to show, Latin is a fundamental in secondary schools, it is clearly the duty of those vested with the responsibility for their management, to see to it that this study is begun and prosecuted to the finish under favorable conditions.

That these favorable conditions exist in the early stages of the study, especially in those schools that admit pupils at the age of fourteen, or younger, and attempt to give them a satisfactory preparation for the best colleges in the country in four years, is seriously questioned. It is quite a common custom in such schools, I believe, to drive the classes through the beginner's Latin book at an unreasonably rapid pace, and to plunge them into Cæsar in the latter part of the first year.

To master and fix firmly in the memory the five declensions, the four conjugations, and a half-dozen irregular verbs, to gain a practical familiarity with the common laws of syntax—not to mention the uses of the subjunctive, the sequence of tenses and the perplexities of conditional sentences and indirect discourse—and to acquire a working vocabulary of seven hundred or one thousand words in the short space of thirty-two weeks is no mean achievement; more especially when it is remembered that

the kind of school work commonly done by pupils before entering upon the study of Latin, is very unlike that which they *then* are called upon to do, and furnishes very little direct preparation for it.

The discouraging perplexities to be met with in Cæsar are even greater than those presented in the beginner's book. Many of the greatest difficulties that are found in the structure of the Latin language, may confront the learner upon a single page of Cæsar's Gallic War. No longer can the student seek for guidance in "model sentences" and "illustrative examples." He must find for himself the solution of the puzzle before him. He is an inexperienced investigator in a strange laboratory where the observations must be made with the utmost fidelity and accuracy. The sentences are long, difficult and uninteresting. They must be analyzed patiently and carefully. Groups of related facts must be collected and noted day after day. When the evidence is abundant and convincing, the student completes the inductive process, and thereby comes into close contact with the structure of the language. In this way he formulates on his own account the rules of syntax which he may use with confidence in all his subsequent study of the Latin language. When the law and the facts upon which the law is based are clearly discerned, then, if need be, the conclusions reached through observation, comparison and inference may be reexamined in the light of the rules laid down in some standard grammar. Until this original work is done by the pupil, the memorizing of syntactic rules may wisely be discouraged.

In some such way as this, I take it, the successful student nowadays must make his way into the mysteries of the structure of the Latin language. This, I submit, is severe work, and the burden of it unhappily falls upon the student in his second year.

My contention is that an attempt to deal with Cæsar in this aggressive and inductive fashion, requires a greater degree of intellectual strength and maturity than can be found in the ordinary pupil whose study of Latin has been limited to a beginner's book.

Then too, it should be remembered that this severe strain—

I know of nothing more severe in the four year's curriculum—is put upon our children just as they are entering upon the first years of their adolescence. Youths of this age are passing through a critical stage of their development and are growing in stature with great rapidity. They have little power of attention, the judgment is immature, and habit of conscious reasoning from groups of facts to general laws is an end not yet attained. To be sure it is nature's appointed time to begin in systematic manner this kind of training; but the amount and severity of it in the early part of the Latin course are greater, as it seems to me, than can be defended in any sound system of pedagogics.

For many a bright girl and boy Cæsar is a trackless forest, an inextricable labyrinth, a dry and dreary desert. A thoughtful girl in my present senior class, when asked to locate and describe the greatest difficulties that she had met in her study of Latin said: "My difficulties were poor preparation in the first year's work, lack of power of concentration, and the dryness of the Gallic Wars. The whole year's work in Cæsar was drudgery to me." Another equally bright pupil said: "I found the most trouble in beginning the study of Cæsar. The chief difficulties arose from the entire newness and what seemed to me the irregularities. I found myself troubled by indirect discourse and other forms of construction which I had learned to understand and write, but which I was not prepared to meet." Many other testimonies of similar import were given by other members of the class. How many are hopelessly lost in this maze of perplexity year by year, we may never know; but to doubt that the number is large would be to discredit a long series of observations made under favorable conditions.

It should be noted here that I am not speaking of the older and more mature students in the academies, but of the younger pupils that are found in the public high schools. To cite a fact for illustration, of the 135 members in the present senior class of the Newton High School, sixty-nine are pursuing the classical course. Twenty-two of the sixty-nine will take their final examination at Cambridge next June,¹ and their average age at the

¹ This refers to June 1895.

date of their admission to college will be seventeen years and seven months. The youngest of the twenty-two will be only fourteen years and nine months old on the 14th day of next June. As usual the candidates for college average somewhat younger than the other members of the class.

In such well managed institutions as the Roxbury Latin School and the Boston Latin School where boys are admitted at an early age and held for a term of five or six years, and where the instruction is exceptionally skillful, it is easy to believe that all the fit survive; but under a four years' curriculum, where a straight course to the doors of the college must be taken, it must needs be that not a few who perchance are a little slow in mind or weak in body, are needlessly sacrificed to an ill-considered arrangement or selection of the Latin authors prescribed for admission to college. It is not my purpose in this brief paper to offer any remedy, or to propose any substitute for a part or all of the required four books of the Gallic War. My only object is to offer testimony in confirmation of some reflections cast upon the Commentaries of Cæsar at New Haven in October, 1893, by Mr. Collar, Mr. Comstock and President Seelye.

In the search for evidence bearing upon this subject, I have carefully canvassed the records of all who began the study of Latin in the Newton High School during the years '88, '89, '90, '91, '92.

Class entered.	Whole number beginning Latin.	I. Dropped Latin during last half of first year.	II. Failed in Latin and left school at end of first year.	III. Entered classical course, dropped Latin at end of first year, changed to general course.	IV. Entered general course and dropped Latin at end of first year.	V. Failed in Latin during second year.	Totals.
1888	83	0	4	4	8	10	26
1889	107	3	10	14	7	13	47
1890	94	5	8	5	13	8	39
1891	153	5	16	5	8	23	57
1892	115	3	13	4	13	10	43
Totals,	552	16	51	32	49	64	212

$$212 \div 552 = 38.4 \text{ per cent.}$$

In determining "the whole number" two classes have been excluded: (1) those who abandoned the study before the middle of the first year; and (2) those who, although they had been successful in the study of Latin, left the school at the end of the first year. The former, it was thought, did not give the subject a fair trial; the latter might, or might not have failed, if they had remained in the school a second year. The whole number concerned in the experiment was 552.

As may be seen by consulting the table, there were several kinds and degrees of failures. The groups I., II. and V., need no explanation. Group III. represents pupils who entered upon a college preparatory course, but abandoned it when they came to see how much effort the acquisition of the Latin language required. It should be remarked at this point that our classes usually finish the beginner's book about the 1st of May and read a part of the second book of the Gallic War before the end of the first year. In other words, all included in the third and fourth groups, were called upon to confront some of the difficulties of Cæsar already referred to. The members of the fourth group began in the general course, and are regarded as failures in Latin, although some of them maintained a creditable standing in their classes during the year. A part of them doubtless might have been successful in the second year if they had been more ambitious, or if the study of the first Latin author had been made less difficult and more interesting. In view, however, of the results attained, it seemed best to rate them as failures, on the theory that it is unprofitable to pursue the study of Latin for one year only.

To summarize, out of 552 who can fairly be said to have participated in this struggle for a mastery over this most useful, ancient, classical language, 212 (38.4) per cent. failed.

That many, under any circumstances, must fail in the study of Latin, I understand full well; but, in the light of all I know about the 212 boys and girls who were vanquished in this contest, I cannot doubt that a percentage of 38.4 per cent. is quite too large.

It is believed that a remedy for these evils in the city of Newton has been found by introducing the study of Latin as an elective into the two upper grades of the grammar schools. In this way the difficulties of the language can be presented to the pupil more gradually, and more time can be devoted to reading easy Latin before beginning Cæsar.

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